

## Loughborough University Institutional Repository

---

# *Ink Remix: Contemporary Art from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, curated by Sophie McIntyre [Exhibition Review]*

This item was submitted to Loughborough University's Institutional Repository by the/an author.

**Citation:** BROWN, K.J., 2016. Ink Remix: Contemporary Art from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, curated by Sophie McIntyre ...[Exhibition Review]. *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 5 (1), pp. 125-147.

### **Additional Information:**

- This paper was accepted for publication in the journal *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and the definitive published version is available at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jcs.5.1.125\\_5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jcs.5.1.125_5) This is an exhibition review of: Ink Remix: Contemporary Art from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong Curated by Sophie McIntyre, exhibited at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, 3 July–18 October 2015; Bendigo Art Gallery, 31 October 2015–7 February 2016; University of New South Wales Galleries, 26 February–21 May 2016; Museum of Brisbane, 16 September 2016–19 February 2017 Artist Textiles: Picasso to Warhol Curated by Dennis Nothdruff, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, 2 May–4 October 2015.

**Metadata Record:** <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/22424>

**Version:** Accepted for publication

**Publisher:** Intellect

**Rights:** This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Please cite the published version.

## ***INK REMIX: CONTEMPORARY ART FROM MAINLAND CHINA, TAIWAN AND HONG KONG***

Curated by Sophie McIntyre, exhibited at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, 3 July–18 October 2015, Bendigo Art Gallery, 31 October 2015–7 February 2016, UNSW Galleries 26 February–21 May 2016, and the Museum of Brisbane, 16 September 2016–19 February 2017

*Reviewed by Kathryn Brown*

*Ink Remix* brings together fourteen contemporary artists whose work draws upon and extends traditions of Chinese ink painting. As revealed by recent exhibitions of works in this genre – the Saatchi Gallery, London (2012) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013–14) – one of the major curatorial challenges in structuring an exhibition of this kind is to communicate how contemporary works relate to the social, symbolic, and pictorial characteristics of the Chinese ink art tradition. Sophie McIntyre's approach is to emphasize the innovative ways in which East Asian artists are engaging with this artistic heritage and to show how a traditional medium is being taken up and transformed within careers that have developed in an international artworld. As McIntyre states in her catalogue essay, this is an exhibition that 'explores the *idea* of ink art as a mutable and fertile field of artistic, philosophical and spiritual enquiry' (McIntyre. 2015: 9). The individuals whose works are on show are not, therefore, identified as 'ink painters' in a narrow sense; rather, they are presented as contemporary artists for whom an engagement with the Chinese tradition of brush and ink informs only part of their output. This is a welcome approach, for it not only brings into relief some of the key features of ancient ink art, but also reveals the exuberant reinvention of visual tropes and styles across time and geography. On a practical level, it also means that the exhibition showcases diverse artistic practices in a wide range of media.

Eugene Wang's contribution to the catalogue provides an important background framework for understanding the innovations on show. He discusses the principal technical features of Chinese ink painting (including the significance of brush and paper type and the impact of different gestural modes of calligraphy and image production) and outlines major trends that took place within the genre during the twentieth century. In contrast to the 'brush-and-ink fundamentalism' of the 1980s, the floodgates, Wang suggests, are now wide open. Both conceptually and materially, contemporary artists are keen to subject 'tradition' to the broadest possible range of formal experimentation.

The works of Hung Keung introduce the viewer to the innovative approaches being taken to this style of production by exploring how brush, ink, and paper may be 'remixed' in new media. The multi-channel video installation *Dao Gives Birth to One – version III* (2009) is the first work that the viewer encounters and it sets the tone for the show's emphasis on reinvention (fig. 1). Through the use of animated Chinese characters that shift in size and density across three uniformly sized screens, the work

explores a notion of unity found within the Dao De Jing. The art of calligraphy is imbued with a new, technological mobility, as concepts from an ancient philosophical text are examined through what appears to be the random collision of pixels to form words and human shapes. A similar interrogation of screen-based 'writing' comes to the fore in a work from Peng Hung-chih's *Canine Monk* series (2004–08), a five-channel video that features a dog as its protagonist (fig. 2). Filmed licking away quotations from religious and philosophical texts that have been inscribed in dog food, the dog appears to write the relevant texts when the footage is played in reverse. While Peng's work is a playful reflection on the role of the artist as a producer of cultural value, it also contains a potent commentary on the relationship between humans and animals, commercialism and spirituality, linguistic and physical sustenance.

'Ink Remix' features a high proportion of video installations, but this does not imply that ink (as a medium) is either ignored or simply dematerialized in the exhibition. On the contrary, a number of striking works probe the materiality of word and image and test the viewer's sensory apprehension of brush and paper. The installation is loosely organized around themes of the human body, landscape (both natural and urban), and history. A path is created through the exhibition that leads the viewer from an interrogation of issues that affect communities and nations as a whole to studies that focus on the unique experience of the perceiving subject.

It is perhaps fitting that works dealing most directly with physical intimacy are placed in central room of the exhibition, a curatorial decision that enhances the confidential focus of the works. He Xianghu's large-scale *Everything we create is not ourselves* (2013–14) covers an entire wall with works on paper, yet consists in repeated studies of the interior of the artist's mouth. From this invitation to explore a private recess of the artist's body, the viewer is led to works that reference the fashionable presentation of the individual. Peng Wei (one of three female artists in the exhibition) decorates Sergio Rossi boots, silk shoes, and the torso of a female mannequin with motifs and landscapes familiar from classical Chinese painting. Yet the translucent silk shoes comprising her *Good Things Come in Pairs – no. 5* (2011–13) contain insoles painted with erotica (fig. 3). A part of the shoe that is typically concealed from view, but in continuous contact with the (implied) wearer's skin, the colourful insoles simultaneously invite and repudiate the viewer's gaze.

If Peng Wei links a brush and ink tradition to the decoration of the human body and the tactile exploration of its secrets, other works imbue 'ink' itself with an unexpected organic quality. In the works of He Xiangyu, an essence produced from boiled-down Coca-Cola is the chosen medium for landscape painting; Cindy Ng Sio Ieng's video 'mind-scapes' comprise imagery produced from mineral water, milk, coffee, beer, and soya sauce; and Charwei Tsai uses foodstuffs (tofu, meat, mushrooms, lotus leaves, and flowers) as unstable background supports for intricate calligraphic decoration (fig. 4). In addition to their visual exuberance, such works invite reflection on the stability of the word as a carrier of cultural meaning as well as on a text's transience and susceptibility to metaphoric decay.

A further curatorial strength of *Ink Remix* is its sensitivity to divergences within the ink art tradition and to the examination of socio-political issues that are relevant to the identities of, and relationships between, mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. An-Yi Pan's catalogue chapter deals specifically with the development of ink art in Taiwan and explores regional and international influences (artistic, philosophical, and political) that have informed its development. While drawing attention to the ways in which contemporary art relates to and celebrates Chinese ink art traditions, the exhibition shows that such an interface is neither naïve nor uncritical. On the one hand, the works demonstrate a new confidence in Chinese and Taiwanese cultural heritage on the part of contemporary East Asian artists from diverse backgrounds; on the other hand, the lens of tradition is also used for the purpose of highlighting tensions that inform life within the region, including rapid urbanization, the impact of environmental degradation, and socio-political factors that shape the creation and expression of national and personal identity.

Recent scholarship on contemporary Chinese ink painting has explored the historical roots of the genre and debated ways in which artists are experimenting with familiar pictorial styles and motifs (Kee, 2010; Elkins, 2013; Hearn 2013). As *Ink Remix* successfully shows, in the twenty-first century Chinese ink art is a vibrant, yet discontinuous tradition. By highlighting artists' willingness to propel that tradition through the exploration of its gaps and fissures, **this** exhibition demonstrates how an artistic practice of the past has been reimagined as a vital form of expression in the present.

## References

- Elkins, James (2013), 'A New Definition of Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting', [https://www.academia.edu/3344609/A\\_New\\_Definition\\_of\\_Chinese\\_Ink\\_Painting](https://www.academia.edu/3344609/A_New_Definition_of_Chinese_Ink_Painting). Accessed 18 August 2015.
- Goedhuis, Michael, Doran, Valerie C., Nahas, Dominique, Wang Tai, Lucie-Smith, Edward, Wang, Eugene and Kuo, Jason (2012), *Ink: The Art of China*, London: Saatchi Gallery / Michael Goedhuis Publishing.
- Hearn, Maxwell K. (2013), *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Kee, Joan (2010), 'The Curious Case of Contemporary Ink Painting', *Art Journal*, 69: 3, 88–113.
- McIntyre, Sophie, Wang, Eugene and An-yi Pan (2015), *INK REMIX: Contemporary Art from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, Canberra: Canberra Museum and Gallery.
- McIntyre, Sophie (2015), 'INK REMIX: Contemporary art from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong' in McIntyre, Wang, and Pan (2015), 8–13.

Fig. 1 Hung Keung + imhk lab, *Dao Gives Birth to One – version III*, 2009, 3 channel video (detail). Image courtesy of the artist and the Canberra Museum & Gallery.

Fig. 2 Peng Hung-chih, *Excerpts from the Taoist Protective Talisman* (from *Canine Monk* series), 2006, 5 channel video. Image courtesy of the artist and the Canberra Museum & Gallery.

Fig. 3 Peng Wei, *Good Things Come in Pairs – no. 5*, 2011–13, silk shoes with painted insoles, 24 × 17.5 × 5 cm. Image courtesy of the artist, the Tina Keng Gallery, and the Canberra Museum & Gallery.

Fig. 4 Charwei Tsai, *Tofu Mantra*, 2005, single channel video. Collection of the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan. Image courtesy of the artist and the Canberra Museum & Gallery.